

# Anatomy of My Affair . . . (an excerpt)

# Intro...

Writing the story of my affair has been somewhat painful. Wounds have been exposed again, but I think there has been some fresh healing, too, and I am thankful for that.

This is only one perspective of one story, but I've tried to tell it honestly, hoping others might learn something from it.

I have purposely said little about one factor in my life that also impacted the choices I made. In the chapter titled The Right Conditions I wrote: *"I had also recently come to some conclusions about 'God issues' over which I had struggled for years, and was left feeling spiritually empty."*

I haven't said much about that simply because it was not the purpose of this blog. I was trying to explain my affair, not my faith.

The truth is, the condition of my faith helped contribute to the emptiness in me--the emptiness I tried to fill with Linda. But my faith continued to crumble and, eventually, I stopped believing.

I lost belief in love, in loyalty, in friendships, in God. I lost belief in myself, too, finding it

easier to focus on my failure--my "fall"--than on the potential of the man I was meant to be.

I'm thankful for grace. I'm thankful for people who have given it to me through the past few years. My children have done this best of all. I find myself growing again, embracing a new understanding of faith... a more authentic kind of faith. I've become a rebeliever.

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I am done with this story for now. If you haven't already, I encourage you to read it from the beginning.

Gratefully,  
ReBeliever

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# 1. Writing about My Affair

My affair ended several years ago, but I still feel its deep emotions and am reminded daily of the many ways it changed my life forever.

Why am I compelled to write about it now? Because I understand the torment that others go through. Because I wonder if what I know now might help someone else. Maybe my story will mean something to the one caught in a love that pulls away from vows previously made; to the lover who is unfairly judged; to the betrayed spouse who struggles to understand *why*; to family and friends who don't know what they should do.

Perhaps the only one who will read this is me. Perhaps that is enough.

This is my story. I won't pretend to speak for others, but I will commit to telling the truth about my experience. No whitewash. No easy answers. Let me write exactly what happened, as best as I can remember... recalling the thoughts, feelings, and choices that led me down unexpected paths.

Because I want to protect others who are part of this story (but may not wish to be known), I am going to change the names and a few of the identifying details.

## 2. Unexpected Unfaithfulness

Before I ever met the woman I eventually married, I use to dream about that future... Who would she be? How many children would we have? Where would we live? What would be the story of our life together? In all my fantasizing, I never once imagined that I would cheat on her.

My upbringing instilled some rather traditional values: "till death do us part" means just that; divorce is never an option; adultery ranks among the *big sins* that are sure to ruin your life.

I never planned on having an affair. In fact, if you had told me, even just a couple months before it happened, that I would be involved with another woman, I would have sincerely denied the possibility. But when the conditions were just right, every conviction flew out the window. Even now, looking back on all that occurred, I am amazed at how easily I moved into the affair.

Several months down the road, a man sat across a table from me and exclaimed in no uncertain terms, "I might be guilty of a lot of things, but that is one thing I could *never* do." It may have sounded like conviction, but I sadly recognized his proud naivety.

# 3. A Vulnerable Marriage

When I met Anne in college, I was instantly attracted. Other men were, too, and so I spent the next three years winning her love. Despite gentle warnings from our parents, who noticed differences between us that caused them some concern, we were married soon after graduation and continued to grow our family with three beautiful children.

Did I love her then? Yes, as much as a 21 year old is capable of loving. After 2 or 3 years, our marriage settled into a "routine" and lost some of its luster. It wasn't wonderful, but it wasn't bad, either, and we witnessed enough *really* unhappy relationships to know ours was better than most.

But is that really enough? Don't most people desire love that is deep, intimacy that is authentic, and sex that is (sometimes, at least) passionate?

Anne and I both wanted a better marriage. Periodically, we would make a special effort to heat things up: read a book, attend a seminar, join a support group, go on a trip, or become a bit more sexually creative. These sparks would temporarily warm the fire, but we inevitably settled back into the more common lukewarmness of the relationship.

For the most part, I simply accepted the fact that things would probably never get better than this. In some ways, it was enough. We experienced the comfort of familiarity; we provided a caring and secure home for our children; we enjoyed a strong network of family and friends. Like most other couples, we learned how to maintain our relationship. But in the deepest part of me, I wasn't satisfied.

And I wasn't alone. Every time I shared these feelings with guy friends, they admitted to experiencing the same tensions. I guess most people just learn how to live with their disappointments.



This disappointment alone wasn't enough to lead me into an affair, but I think it at least set the stage for what would eventually be played out. My marriage became more vulnerable when I started to do these two things:

### **1. I began focusing on what was lacking.**

When I thought about our relationship, I tended to think more about our differences than our similarities. I mourned our weaknesses rather than finding joy in our strengths. Under this judgement, affection began to wither. My love for Anne became one of choice, not passion.

It's easy for me to play the martyr and shoulder all the blame, but I know Anne also made choices that pushed us apart. She put more energy into being a mother than into being a wife. She affirmed me less and criticized me more.

I think we both began to sadly accept the belief that *this is as good as it's ever going to get*.

### **2. I began imagining something better.**

I found myself thinking about women who seemed closer to "my type." I didn't become romantically involved with them (and even flatly declined some offers to do so), but I did feel the emotional draw. Sometimes I thought about what it would be like to be in love with someone else. Each time I did this, I think another stone fell from the wall that guarded my commitment to Anne.

What happens when love begins to lose its heart? When feelings diminish and duty is left to pick up the slack? I longed for something more. After enough failed attempts to find it in my marriage, I entertained the *thought* of finding it somewhere else.

## 4. The Right Conditions

An affair requires two things: opportunity and willingness. During my first 12 years of marriage, there were opportunities, but never the willingness.

That doesn't mean I had no curiosity. Dissatisfaction with my marriage sometimes led me to wonder what it might be like to be with someone else. But thoughts never turned into action because I valued faithfulness and feared the consequences of infidelity.

Once, during the first day of a week long conference in Atlanta, I was placed in a discussion group with a woman who was very attractive to me, both in appearance and behavior. She enjoyed my company, too, and occasionally spent time with me during the week. Eventually, I had the distinct impression that I would be welcome to spend the night in her room; all I had to do was ask. I didn't ask, but at the end of the conference she gave me her address, asked me to come visit her, and hugged me good-bye.

I never contacted her again. In fact, when I returned home, I told my wife all about the encounter. My response to that incident, and a few others like it, convinced me that I would never give in to the temptation of an affair. But although I never *acted* on the temptation, I *thought* about it. Months after that event, when feeling distant from my wife, I wondered what it would have been like to spend a night in the other woman's arms.

That's as far as my unfaithfulness would have gone, I think, if everything in my life had just remained steady and predictable. It didn't.

The company I worked for began experiencing tremendous growth, which required extra time at the office. As hard as I worked, the CEO never seemed to be quite satisfied, so I doubled my efforts. Work kept me away from home and

my wife became increasingly frustrated and critical. I had also recently come to some conclusions about "God issues" over which I had struggled for years, and was left feeling spiritually empty. It seemed I couldn't quite match up to anyone's expectations.

During this period of personal turmoil, I was asked to partner with Linda, a business acquaintance, on a company project. The time was ripe for an affair. I had opportunity: working with Linda nearly every day, often alone. And I finally had willingness: ready to explore a relationship that would make me feel appreciated and loved. Within two months, the affair had begun...

## 5. The Other Woman

"Why *her*? What does she have that *I* don't have?" Those were the questions my wife would eventually ask me-- questions I've since heard repeated by many betrayed spouses.

What was it about Linda that made it easy to develop a relationship that led to an affair? Initially, I was most attracted to those qualities in her that were, in my opinion, lacking in my wife.

When I became disappointed in my marriage, I found it easy to focus on Anne's inadequacies. I realize now that she still possessed all the qualities I had originally loved, but the years of familiarity had made it easier for me to focus on our differences... on the ways we failed to connect with each other. Of course, once I was convinced of these areas of incompatibility, I was also apt to pay more attention when I observed other women who seemed to be missing these flaws.

It wasn't about physical beauty. Linda was cute, but I think many would have considered my wife better looking. No, it was her confidence, professionalism, articulation, and life goals: these were the things that drew me to her.

This attraction alone, however, would not have been enough for me to open the door to an affair. Her admiration accomplished that.

I wanted approval. I wanted to be valued, appreciated. Because I was going through a discouraging time in my life, I felt an especially strong desire to hear someone tell me they believed in me.

Anne never did this very well. Maybe it was because of her own insecurities. Maybe it was because I didn't show *her* enough appreciation. Maybe it was a mix of both. Whatever the reasons, that kind of affirmation didn't come from home.

But it came from Linda.

Linda often complimented me on my work and abilities. These remarks were genuine and, at first, probably innocent. I was thirsty for them and so I looked forward to each day of work with her: another opportunity to take a sip. At some point, I think, she realized my need and willingly gave me more of what I wanted.

We talked and joked and laughed and shared stories about our lives. I began to think of Linda as someone who naturally connected with me--a soul mate. I started finding reasons to spend more time with her and thought about her constantly, even at night while in bed with my wife. For the first time in many years, I felt alive and hopeful.

Even at this point, I can think of a number of events that could have intervened and kept me from having an affair. But I didn't want to be stopped, so I kept everything private. Even my closest friends didn't know where I was headed. The only thing I wasn't sure about was whether Linda shared my feelings. I decided to find out.



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